

Departing from
Iniquity or
Inconsistency

Misfortune Recurred
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DEPARTING FROM INIQUITY OR INCONSISTENCY

2 TIMOTHY, CHAPTER 2.

IT is evident that there are many Christians walking outwardly in the path of separation to the Lord, who have never really judged *as iniquity* that from which they are apart. Spiritual food, the attractiveness of the Lord Jesus and the desire to be where His presence is truly known, are positive things that draw souls into the path ; and no doubt all would desire to be faithful in it. It is, however, to be feared that many, if they challenged themselves, would discover that separation, in their minds, has been a matter of leaving inconsistency rather than iniquity.

Now inconsistency in itself would be no ground for separation. Otherwise Christian fellowship would become an impossibility, for where, alas, is the Christian who could claim complete consistency with the truth he holds ? If

anyone is looking for perfection in this regard he is sure to be disappointed, but God's great issue with Christendom is the allowance of iniquity. Love may forbear inconsistencies, but it can never tolerate evil, and unless, in some measure, we have learned to judge things with God, we shall fail to stand in a crisis.

The most serious crises, of course, are those which arise in the course of the Testimony of our Lord, but in our private lives minor crises occur, such as the wedding or burial of a relative who has been linked with worldly religious associations, and sometimes a major crisis may arise, such as being placed in a town far from a meeting. We live in a day of compromise, and at such times the temptation to compromise is strong, but there can be no greater mistake than to suppose that we shall help ourselves or our fellows by compromising with *iniquity*.

Iniquity in this sense is lawlessness in the things of God. If lawlessness in a man's private affairs will bring the man into judgment, how much more serious is lawlessness in the holy things of God. That men, ignoring God's revealed mind, should presume to bring into *His* house

their own ideas as to the ordering of its service and government, is an outrage and an affront to God. Not only, therefore, is the doctrine of a clergy and laity iniquitous, but so also are the doctrines which assert the independence of local assemblies and the "right" of Christians, who continue in unclean associations, to partake of the Lord's Supper. So also is every sectarian doctrine and human innovation.

"Withdraw from iniquity" is a strong expression. The word "withdraw" in the original, has a meaning, the force of which, does not suppose any return whatsoever. If what is left is judged as *iniquity* how could a soul return? God looks to His people, as naming the name of the Lord, to judge in this definite way that from which they have withdrawn; for it is said of Babylon, where iniquity is full-blown, "God has judged your judgment upon her." Revelation 18 : 20.

Satan is ceaseless in his efforts to weaken the judgment of the saints in this matter, but this scripture in 2 Timothy chapter 2. meets his specious arguments. In an endeavour to justify human systems, men will urge the fact that the Lord

sees to it that His own in them do get food, however little, to keep them spiritually alive ; and also that the Lord uses them. Such an idea is met by the word, “ If we are unfaithful, he abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself.” 2 Timothy 2 : 13. No evil will prevent the Lord Jesus from caring for His own, and He knows those that are His ; nor will He be restrained from using them in blessing to others. The fact, however, that He abides faithful is no warrant for our remaining unfaithful. On the contrary, the unwearied faithfulness of His love should fill our hearts with the desire to be wholly faithful to Him and true to His Name.

A second form of attack is the plea that one who is sufficiently enlightened to judge of the iniquity, is the very one who should remain in the system in order to help the Christians in it, and to heal the evil condition. The answer to this is, “ their word shall spread as a gangrene,” verse 17. Human thoughts and innovations appeal to the natural mind and infect all who remain in contact with them. No physician attempts to heal gangrene. He calls in the surgeon to cut

off the affected limb. So the way of obedience, and the only way of safety, is for each to cut himself off from the gangrenous condition and to "touch not the unclean thing." Then he will be in a position truly to help others.

Thirdly, the enemy would suggest that, in separating, one's activities will be hampered and circumscribed. Scripture asserts the very opposite. The word is, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these (i.e., vessels to dis-honour) in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for *every* good work," verse 21. Such a one is not a departmentalist, but is available to the Master as prepared for service in every direction—Godward, saint-ward and man-ward, whereas the serviceability of a soul in unclean associations is necessarily very limited. Wherever iniquity is, the service Godward is greatly impaired and, in its true assembly character, ceases ; while the service man-ward falls far below the level of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which Paul was entrusted. As departing from iniquity the believer, even in these last days, can

know the joy of being available to the Lord Jesus in that which is nearest to His heart—the praise and worship of God in the assembly ; and can only thus be really true to the gospel, for the basic principles of the gospel—righteousness, faith, love, peace—can only be followed as in separation to the Lord.

The only standard a true lover of Christ can accept is the maintenance of every divine thought and every divine principle in integrity. Nothing less will keep us in the company of those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, in company with Paul who to the end surrendered nothing. In his ministry divine thoughts and principles are presented at their full height without human admixture. To give up one principle is to turn away from Paul. "All in Asia," he says, "have turned away from me." His ministry always has been, and still is, the great test of wholehearted obedience and faithfulness ; and for those who receive it, it becomes the means whereby they can test all that professes the Lord's Name on earth.

While a true believer will not hesitate to withdraw from iniquity, he will have

uninterrupted pain as a necessary accompaniment ; the separation from those who may at heart be true believers, though linked with vessels to dishonour, will produce this, yet with it, the readiness to hold oneself towards such in the meekness and gentleness of Christ ; “ For the bondman of the Lord ought not to strive but be gentle towards all,” verse 24.

We need ever to remember that if Satan fails to induce us to compromise, he will endeavour to mar the testimony by an attack upon our spirits ; so that while maintaining the truth in terms and position, we may misrepresent the Lord by showing a harsh, legal, or pharisaical attitude towards the persons from whom we have had to separate, and so Paul’s final word to Timothy is : “ The Lord, Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

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